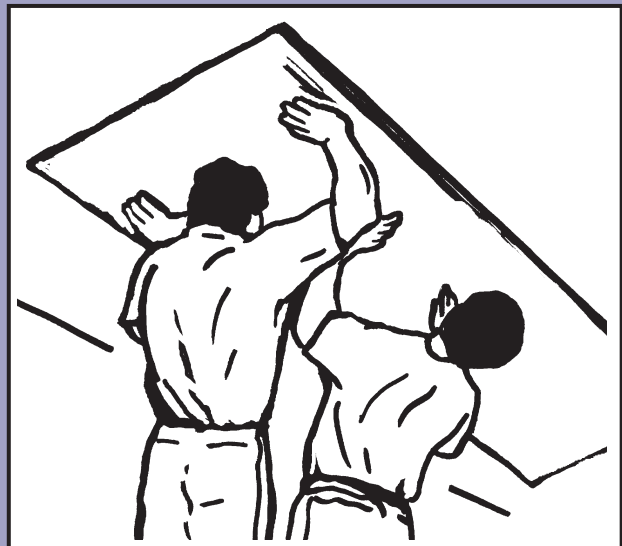


DRYWALL INSTALLERS

Prevent Back, Wrist, Neck and Shoulder Injuries

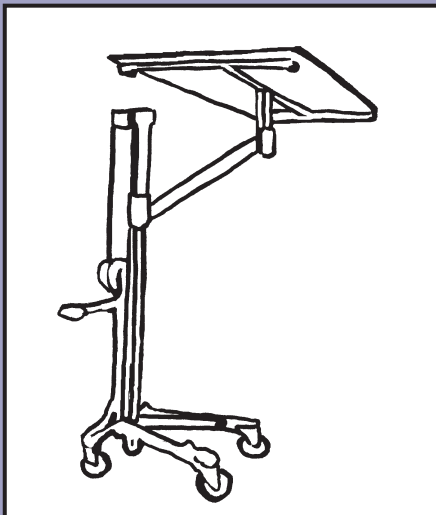
INSIDE:

- ▶ Causes and Symptoms of Injury
- ▶ More Ways to Prevent Injuries



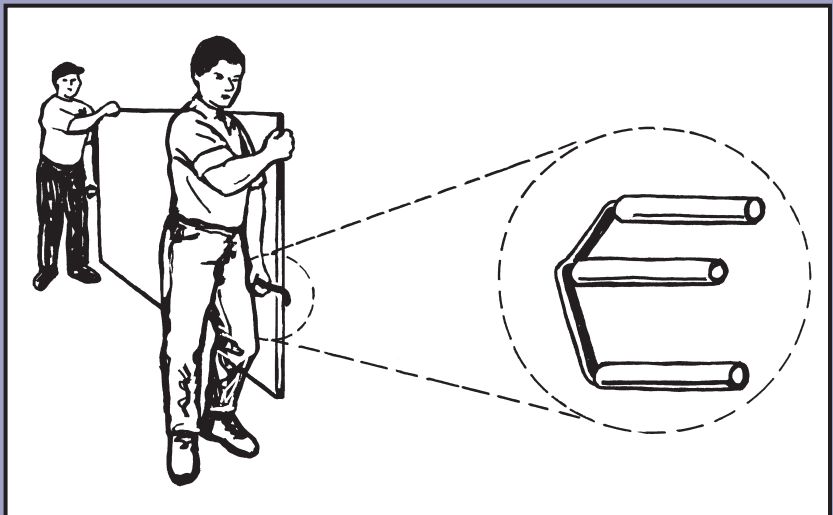
Lifting, carrying and holding drywall in place can injure your muscles and joints.

Two ways to make drywall installation safer



A MECHANICAL LIFT:

- Lifts and holds drywall in place at various ceiling heights
- Some models also tilt for walls or cathedral ceilings



SMALL 3-PRONG HANDLES:

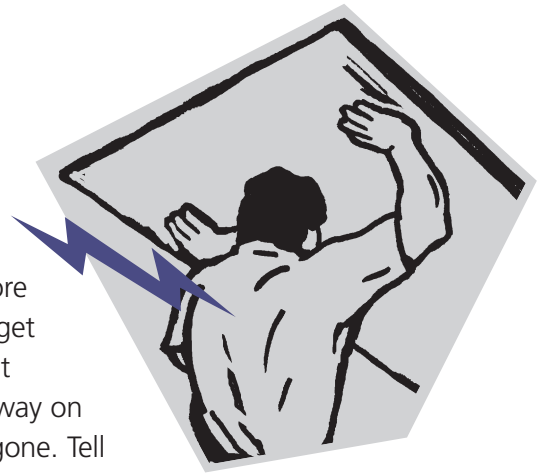
- One prong is used as a hand grip
- The other two prongs slip onto drywall and hold by friction
- Works well for a 2-person lift
- Inexpensive

NOVEMBER 2001

California Department of Health Services • California Department of Industrial Relations

Is Your Job Causing You Problems With Your Back, Wrists, Neck or Shoulders?

- ▶ **Symptoms like numbness, weakness, tingling or pain** affect many drywall installers. These symptoms may be related to your job.
- ▶ **Symptoms may start gradually.** Many people try to ignore them at first. However, if you ignore them, symptoms can get worse and become harder to treat. Symptoms may occur at night, but still be work-related. Even if the symptoms go away on your days off, it doesn't necessarily mean the condition is gone. Tell your employer and get medical care right away if you have symptoms.
- ▶ **These symptoms may indicate serious injuries** and may interfere with your work and personal activities. They can even lead to permanent disability.



Why Do Drywall Installers Have These Problems?

- ▶ **Forceful, repeated motions** such as lifting, cutting, taping, and sanding—over and over, all day long—are hard on your back and hands. Each motion can cause small injuries to muscles and joints.
- ▶ **Heavy lifting while bending** puts intense stress on your back. Even strong muscles can be injured, and spinal discs can be damaged.
- ▶ **Awkward positions**, like reaching overhead and holding drywall in place, is hard on the joints and muscles of the neck, shoulders, back and hands.
- ▶ **Long work hours with few breaks** mean less time for muscle and joint injuries to heal.
- ▶ **Cold work sites.** Cold hands have poor blood circulation, so forceful, repeated work motions can injure them more easily.
- ▶ **A stressful work environment** caused by pressure to work fast, to work overtime, and to meet deadlines can cause injuries.

How Can Injuries Be Prevented?

By law, your employer is responsible for providing a safe and healthful workplace. Here are some things you and your employer can do to prevent injuries.

- ▶ **Talk with others at work.** Do workers have symptoms? Are some of the causes of injury present: heavy lifting, awkward positions, repetitive motions, cold? Does the employer know what preventive actions to take?
- ▶ **Use equipment that does the lifting and carrying for you,** like drywall carts and lifts, whenever possible.
- ▶ **Rotate jobs.** For example, if one part of the job requires a lot of overhead work, switch for a while to an activity in another position that uses different work motions.
- ▶ **Keep your hands warm and dry.** Dressing warmly in cold weather helps hands stay warm. Wear gloves, and change them if they get wet.
- ▶ **Practice safer lifting methods.** See “When You Lift Manually, Lift Safely,” page 5. Minimize the need for lifting; have materials delivered close to where they will be used.
- ▶ **Select tools that are easier on the body.** When buying power tools, consider the weight, grip comfort, ease of triggering, vibration and noise. Four-finger triggers are best.
- ▶ **Rest for 15 seconds, many times throughout the day.** Studies show that even very short breaks help prevent injury and fatigue.
- ▶ **Negotiate safety items into contracts.** Ideally, a long-term strategy to prevent injuries should include items such as:
 - **Realistic deadlines** to prevent fatigue that can cause injuries and accidents.
 - **Architectural specifications** for reduced-weight materials such as 3’X6’ drywall.
 - **Cooperation from other subcontractors** on safety items such as housekeeping, safe walkways, and adequate access for equipment.

Taking Action to Prevent Injuries

- ▶ **Form a safety committee.** It can be a big help in keeping your workplace safe. Get key people from both labor and management to participate. A successful committee is one that has strong employer support. An experienced ergonomic consultant can provide technical assistance. Here's what a safety committee can do:
 - Talk to workers and inspect jobs to find conditions that can cause injuries.
 - Encourage workers to report work-related injuries and symptoms to their supervisor.
 - Identify the jobs that have caused injuries.
 - Figure out how particular jobs may be causing injuries.
 - Develop practical solutions and recommend that management try them out on a few individuals.
 - Check to see if the changes are effective before recommending them for all affected jobs.
 - Monitor employees using new equipment and/or making other job changes.

What Does the Law Say?

- ▶ **Your employer may have to follow a California rule about repetitive work. Find out:**
 - Were two or more workers injured within the last 12 months? The injured workers must have done the same type of work.
 - Did a doctor report that each injury is mainly caused by the job? Each worker can have a different diagnosis, as long as it's related to the same kind of repetitive work.
- ▶ **If the answer to both questions is "Yes," the employer must change the work or equipment to prevent injuries.** Worker training also is required.

This rule is called Repetitive Motion Injuries (General Industry Safety Order 5110). It is enforced by Cal/OSHA.

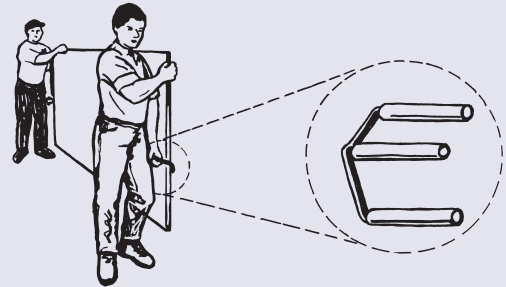
What is Cal/OSHA? It is California's Division of Occupational Safety and Health. This government agency investigates workers' complaints and answers questions about workplace safety rules. Complaints are confidential. Find the phone number in the blue Government Pages near the front of the phone book. Look under: State of California, Industrial Relations, Division of Occupational Safety and Health, Compliance or Enforcement.

For employers, California has the Consultation Service (**1-800-963-9424**). This agency explains workplace health and safety regulations, and helps employers comply with them. They do not cite or impose fines.

When You Lift Manually, Lift Safely

Organize Jobs Beforehand

- ▶ **Clear your path of obstacles before starting.** Tripping or slipping while carrying can cause an injury.
- ▶ **Try to set up loads so they are closer to waist height.** Avoid lifting from the ground. Use carts, tables or temporary platforms to hold loads that will be lifted again.
- ▶ **Try handles for carrying drywall.** Handles improve your grip and may also make the lift less awkward. Some handles are designed for one-person carrying, and some for two-person carrying.
- ▶ **Try tools to reduce the time you spend in overhead lifting and holding.** For ceiling work, T-jacks may help (two 2X4's in a T). Board hanger clamps can help hold drywall in place for nailing.



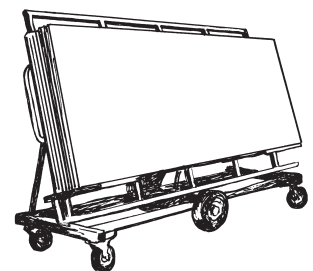
Use Safe Procedures

- ▶ **Get help with heavy and awkward loads.** Offer help to others. Make two-person lifts the standard procedure for your crew.
- ▶ **Stand with feet apart** (shoulder-width).
- ▶ **Keep the load as close to the body as possible** while lifting, carrying, and putting down the load. Avoid reaching over obstacles.
- ▶ **Avoid twisting your back while lifting and carrying.** Twisting can hurt the spine. Instead, use your feet to turn your body.

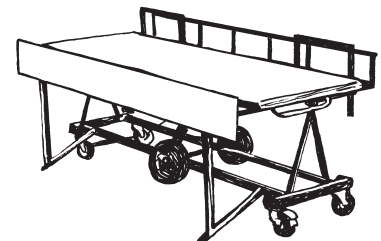
Another type of equipment to help prevent injuries:

A combination worktable and cart:

- When used as a cart, the boards are tilted up, and the big center wheels are used; they can roll over uneven surfaces.



- When used as a worktable, the center wheels retract, and the drywall is held level.



For More Information

► **HESIS (Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service).** www.dhs.ca.gov/ohb

Answers questions about workplace hazards and has many free publications available.

For information on workplace hazards: (510) 622-4317. Please leave a message and your call will be returned.

For HESIS Publications: (510) 622-4328

- **Guide to Getting Medical Care for Job-Related Pain That Won't Go Away.** Helps workers recognize symptoms that need treatment; choose a doctor; and work with health care providers, employers, and the workers' compensation system.
- **Physician's Guide to the California Ergonomics Standard.** Helps health care providers identify, document and treat work-related musculoskeletal disorders.
- **HESIS Publications List.** Pamphlets and fact sheets on workplace hazards including chemicals, repetitive motion, and infectious diseases. Visit our website, call or write for the list.

► **Workers' Compensation.** If you are injured on the job, or work makes an existing injury worse, you may have a right to receive benefits such as medical care, wage replacement and retraining (if a job change is needed). Benefits are available to all workers, including immigrants, part-time and temporary workers. Call **1-800-736-7401** for more information and for free factsheets, in English and Spanish.

► **Cal/OSHA Consultation Service** Helps employers to improve safety and health conditions without triggering enforcement inspections. Call **1-800-963-9424** for assistance or to ask for the free booklets, *Easy Ergonomics* and *Cal/OSHA Pocket Guide for the Construction Industry*.

► **Other resources for safety and ergonomics in the construction industry.**

- **National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)**, a federal research agency, issues publications on ergonomics subjects including back belts, musculoskeletal disorders, and how to evaluate lifting tasks (*Applications Manual for the Revised NIOSH Lifting Equation*). Visit www.cdc.gov/niosh/ergopage.html.
- **Ergonomics for Carpenters**, an illustrated guide detailing chronic work injuries, their causes, and ways to prevent them. Full version (\$5.00) or a pocket edition (\$.50) plus shipping. From the United Brotherhood of Carpenters. Call **(702) 938-1111 ext. 318** or write UBC, 6801 Placid, Las Vegas NV 89119.
- **The Center to Protect Workers Rights** provides many useful publications on all aspects of construction safety and health. Visit www.cpwr.com, call **(202) 962-8490** or write: 111 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001.

ABOUT THIS FACT SHEET This publication was produced by HESIS, the Hazard Evaluation System and Information Service, Department of Health Services and Department of Industrial Relations, State of California. We wish to acknowledge assistance and illustrations from the United Brotherhood of Carpenters Health & Safety Fund, NIOSH, the State of Washington Department of Labor and Industries, and the Laborers International Union. This publication, however, does not necessarily reflect the views of these organizations.

The recommendations in this fact sheet were developed by HESIS based on our evaluation of research studies and published information, and on general ergonomic principles. They may not be appropriate for every job or individual worker. Images showing brand-name equipment designs do not constitute endorsement.

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HESIS

**HAZARD EVALUATION SYSTEM
& INFORMATION SERVICE**

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OSP 01 63163